
Issue #5
Food
Protection
Management
Training

Should the state require managers in the retail food industry to have a minimal level of food safety training and education?

Background

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that between 6.5 million and 81 million cases of food-borne illness result from such pathogens as *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella*. As many as 9,100 related deaths occur annually nationwide. Certain consumer populations such as infants, children, the elderly, and people with suppressed immune systems are at especially high risk of serious illness from contaminated foods.

Studies have shown that basic training for retail food workers in food safety has resulted in much safer food preparation and storage practices in retail food establishments (restaurants and groceries) and decreases in the incidence of food-borne illnesses. Currently, only 17 larger Texas cities under home rule authority require training and certification of retail food managers. Food manager training and certification is voluntary in the rest of the state.

TDH conducted a survey of 2,722 retail food workers in all types of establishments and job levels in those areas of the state where food managers are not required to be trained. When asked questions regarding basic food safety and sanitation, the average score for survey respondents was 64.2% out of a possible 100%.

Discussion

Statewide training and certification of retail food managers would help reduce the risk of food-borne illness to all consumers in Texas, not just those in large metropolitan areas. TDH currently only has authority under Chapter 438, Subchapter D, Health and Safety Code, to set standards for accreditation of food manager education and training programs. The statute requires 14 hours of classroom training and successful passage of an examination. The national trend, however, is to rely solely on passage of an examination and in so doing, allow for other educational methods such as CD-ROM, home study, and distance learning. Any legislation proposed should be consistent with this trend. TDH and Texas A&M University have developed the infrastructure to assure food safety training is available in rural counties. TDH has certified 287 Texas A&M instructors in more than 200 counties in the state. In addition, 137 other state-accredited training programs are currently available to food managers.

Recommendations

To reduce the risks of food-borne illness to all Texas consumers in retail food establishments:

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- **Require managers in the retail food industry statewide to have a minimal level of food safety training and education.**
 - **Amend Chapter 438, Subchapter D, Health and Safety Code to reflect the national trends for accreditation and training of food managers.**